



RCA Consumer e-News

Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Consumer Protection & Information Section
Spring 2021

April is National *Safe Digging* Month

HOMEOWNER RESPONSIBILITY

Many Alaskans enjoy improving their property through projects such as gardening, building decks and fences, or digging for patios and sidewalks.



But when someone decides to take shortcuts, weekend projects can lead to Internet and cable outages, injuries, or worse damages such as gas explosions.

That's why it's so important (actually, it's a law) to have buried utilities located and marked before you dig. This will ensure that your project does not result in an unwelcome surprise to you, your family, or neighbors.

EXCAVATOR RESPONSIBILITY

Whether you are a professional excavator, contractor, engineer, or handyman, you play an important role keeping Alaskans safe with EVERY dig.

Don't gamble with safety! Fines and penalties can be assessed for \$200,000 up to \$2,000,000.



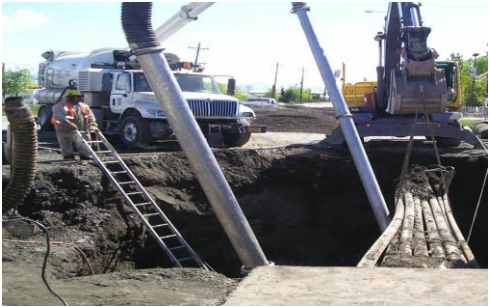
CALL 8-1-1 or visit 811ak.com before digging.

REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA

Consumer Protection & Information Section
701 West 8th Avenue, Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99501
rca.alaska.gov | cp.mail@alaska.gov
(907) 276-6222 | Toll Free 1-800-390-2782 | TTY 7-1-1

RCA Initiates Formal Review of AWWU's Rate Increase Requests

The Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) has designated Dockets [U-21-010](#) and [U-21-011](#) for the Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility (AWWU) rate case and temporarily approved a 2% water rate increase and an 8% sewer rate increase effective April 1, 2021.



According to the [documents filed](#) by AWWU, there are a number of relevant factors and specific drivers of the rate increase, including continued growth in operating costs, maintenance expense, intergovernmental charges, and the Municipal Utility Service Assessment (MUSA) payment in lieu of tax.

The Attorney General's Regulatory Affairs and Public Advocacy has filed a notice of its intent to intervene on the rate case to represent the public interest.

Why did the RCA approve interim rates amidst the pandemic?

The RCA recognizes the financial impacts of utility rate changes to Alaskan consumers. The RCA also has a duty to protect the public interest and ensure adequate, safe, and reliable public utility services. The rate case will allow scrutiny of AWWU's rate increase requests before making a decision about an increase to permanent rates or not.

In AWWU's prefiled testimonies and studies included in the tariff filings, the utilities indicated substantial revenue deficiency of approximately \$3.2 million for water and \$6.9 million for sewer, demonstrating that the current rates are so low as to be considered confiscatory and that an immediate interim rate increase is required. AWWU indicated that a delay in rate relief would impede AWWU's operations and completion of required capital projects.



The RCA granted AWWU's requests for across-the-board rate increases of 2% for water and 8% for sewer on an interim and refundable basis, effective April 1, 2021. Interim and refundable rates protect consumers if the permanent rates approved are less than the interim rates. AWWU has established an escrow account for any refunds due to customers if permanent rates are lower than the interim and refundable rates.

How will the rate increase affect my monthly water and sewer bill?

For single-family homes, the rate increases roughly translates into a monthly increase of \$1.09 per month for water service and \$3.85 per month for sewer service. See [Public Notice issued December 30, 2020](#).

I am financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where can I get help to pay for my utility bills?

If you are having trouble making bill payments, contact your utilities. Discuss your situation and options with them. Many electric, gas, water, and wastewater utilities are continuing to offer payment flexibilities for consumers experiencing hardship. Help is available through payment plans, deferral arrangements, and other options. You may also contact the Alaska 2-1-1, which is a one-stop resource for all kinds of assistance needed. It's important for customers to pay what they can and keep in contact with their utilities.

RCA Thanks Commissioner Stephen McAlpine

Commissioner Stephen McAlpine served as a Commissioner from March 1, 2015, through February 28, 2021, and as the Chairman during fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

"He's had a long distinguished career in public service, including as the Mayor of Valdez, Lieutenant Governor of the State of Alaska for eight years; and I appreciated his humor and good sense as we have had a number of very, very difficult proceedings before us," said Chairman Bob Pickett during the Special Public Meeting held February 26, 2021.

Raised in Washington State, he graduated from the University of Washington and the Seattle University School of Law. Commissioner McAlpine came to Alaska in 1970 when he settled in Valdez, Alaska. While living in Valdez, he was elected to the city council and was twice elected as its Mayor. In 1982, he was elected to his first of two terms as Alaska's Lieutenant Governor. In that capacity he was selected by his peers as both the Vice Chairman and Chairman of the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors. In 1988, he was selected as a Toll Fellow by the National Conference of State Governments. He served as Chairman of Westrends, liaison to the Western Conference of State Legislators, and a member of the National Conference of Secretaries of State.

McAlpine currently resides in Anchorage with his wife, Dana. His professional career has included a wide variety of legal matters for hundreds of individual and corporate clients in civil, criminal, and administrative law at both the state and federal levels. During his professional career, he has served on numerous state and local boards and commissions and on the Board of Directors of several corporations and nonprofit organizations.

Effective March 1, 2021, Commissioner [Keith Kurber II](#) will assume McAlpine's seat for a six-year term.



Replacing Light Bulbs?

Newer bulbs like CFLs (Compact Fluorescent Lighting) and LEDs (Light Emitting Diode) last longer and use less energy than the traditional incandescent bulbs, saving you money on your energy bills.

Lumens = brightness

Watts = energy

CFLs last about 10,000 hours. LEDs last approximately 25,000 hours. An LED bulb uses only about 20 watts of electricity compared to an incandescent 100 watt bulb.

By comparing the wattage and life of different bulbs of the same luminance, you can select the light bulb that provides the best combination of light output, length of life, and energy use.

Learn more and start saving! Check out the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's [Energy Saver Tips](#).